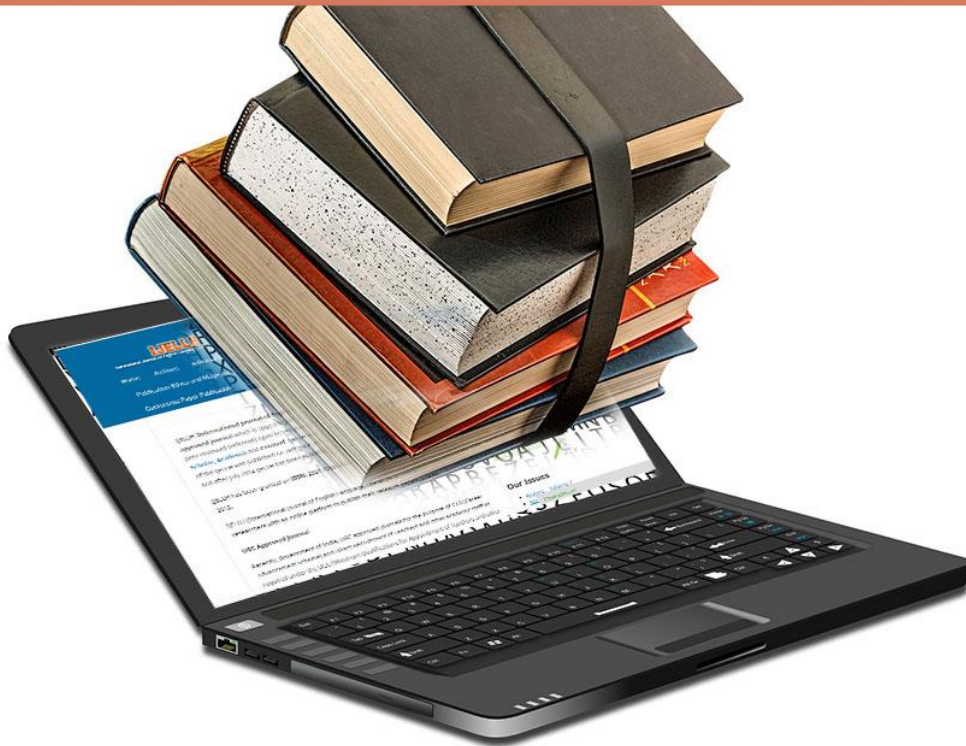


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Identity, Alterity and Gender Fluidity; Negotiation and Submission-A Study of Pradeep

Saurabh's Tesari Tali

“In a country where it seems precedence is given to cows over human beings so far as the right to life is concerned, transgenders are fighting a losing battle,” says Shanavi Ponnusamy, who has been allegedly denied a job by Air India for being a trans woman. An engineering graduate who had to go till the Supreme Court and even write to the President requesting mercy killing, Shanavi shared her plight at a press conference here,” reports The Hindu on Thursday, July 26, 2018, page-18 and on the other hand on the same day at page no. 4, Metro Plus, The Hindu has published an article entitled Colourful Identities-A 20year old US based Tamil transman breaks norms of race, gender and religion through his art.”

We are living in a beautiful world where we love to have things which are mixed in nature as sun and shade, sour and sweet, bonsai plants and so on. But when it comes to talk about mixed gender or mixed sexes, we start frowning. We are living in a society where hermaphrodites are not welcomed. Male or female, are the only sex which is legitimate to be in society, other than them, are automatically marginalized and doomed to live their lives with an ambiguous identity or with no identity. Gender and sex are often linked and considered as same. Sexuality and

other's perceptions become a vital agency to determine one's identity which generates a psychological disturbance, social incoherence and cultural insecurities as well. Pradeep Saurabh's *Tesari Tali* helps to understand various implications and misconception pertaining to gender role, consequential marginality and offers an open talk on gender fluidity, predefined image and urgency of the concerns pertaining to third gender.

Whenever a tension grows high and takes a giant form we have a tendency to look back in anger; so let us have a peep in the history. In India we have many stories related to hermaphrodite, who were called as Hijra (abode of God) and they were considered spiritually powerful. We have story of Shikhandi in The Mahabharata and the image of God as 'ardh narishwar' (half man-half woman) as well. During the Mughal reign, they had advantageous position in the palace and their work was to give security to royal women. The condition and thoughts pertaining to them became worst with the advent of British rule in our country when Hijras were being called as 'sodomites' a pejorative term to describe their identity and were being discriminated on the basis of their ambiguous genitalia.

Gradually, with the elapse of time people started looking down upon them and started getting scared of them based on their biased notion about them and their godly blessing has obtained a distorted myth that they are blessed so that they can curse and can turn someone's life a hell. Negativity has got associated with their blessings. They don't have any dignified place in society and no social rights. They have their predefined role to play and prerequisite destiny to live. They kept on struggling to find a place in the mainstream and to change the mindset of people and eventually, The Supreme Court passes a verdict where they are defined as third gender and are given equal rights as any other male or female has. That was the historical day in Indian history. Though the struggle is continued; objectives are yet to be achieved and to change the attitude of the people is a great challenge. In fact, in general sense, we usually take the terms sex and gender as the same but it is not. Sex is biological and gender

is a social construct. Male and female are two acceptable sex-names in our society and man -- woman, masculine feminine are genders which are meant to be performed according to their gender roles.

Pradeep Saurabh is writer who writes in Hindi and his novel *Tesari Tali* is a thought provoking work which compels us to discuss the issues related to third gender, their struggle and agony as well. Pradeep Saurabh is a novelist, journalist, a photographer, a poet and a researcher as well. His writings are well marked with a critical approach to the subject and a bold and outspoken style. To dig out the truth he usually, goes beyond the truth and debunks the hidden hypocrisy. His novel *Munni Mobile* is a masterpiece in Hindi Literature. *Tesari Tali* is his second novel where in the beginning page itself he has proclaimed loudly, alike the characters of *Munni Mobile* the heroes and villains of this novel are also not imaginary. His negative strategy to vocalize the authenticity of his characters are fantastic. Usually, a reader at the end of the novel forgets everything and disregard all that he or she has read, is fake and fictional but Pradeep Saurabh has tried to convince the reader first by announcing whatever he has written are not at all false depiction.

Tesari Tali is not a story of a transgender or hermaphrodite but an intentionally woven well structure of several stories. He does not narrate a single story but presents many stories to showcase the multitude of aspects pertaining to third gender in Indian society. The narrative starts with the arrival of a group of Hijras in a colony in Delhi where they fail to collect some money from Gautam sahib at the time of birth of a son in his family. The pitiful condition of transgenders is emphatically depicted here whose role to perform their assigned gender role has been given priority. No matter how intellectual, artistic and capable they are but their sole role in our society is to entertain people by dancing and collecting money for their living and to live on the margin in their community. They are never considered to be a part of our so-called society. They are not only sexually marginalized but they are marginalized culturally

and socially as well. The social interaction of transgenders and their imposed identity and constructed self can be studied on the theoretical framework of Erving Goffman's studies of social theory of symbolic interaction. In his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* which came in 1956 where he has used imagery from theatre and has given importance to human social interaction with dramaturgical analysis approach.

“Goffman also believed that all participants in social interactions are engaged in practices to avoid being embarrassed or embarrassing others. This led to Goffman's dramaturgical analysis. Goffman saw a connection between the kinds of acts that people put on in their daily life and theatrical performances.

In social interaction, as in theatrical performance, there is a front region where the performers (individuals) are on stage in front of the audiences. This is where the positive aspect of the idea of self and desired impressions are highlighted. There is also a back region, where individuals can prepare for or set aside their role. The "front" or performance that an actor plays out includes "manner", or how the role is carried out, and "appearance" including the dress and look of the performer. Often, performers work together in "teams" and form bonds of collegiality based on their common commitment to the performance they are mutually engaged in.” (Wikipedia)

The core of Goffman's analysis lies in the relationship between performance and life. He also talks about maintaining the face which is very relevant in relation to transgenders life.

Our overt culture projects their image within which they are supposed to play their role. Dimple is a character in the novel whose will is indomitable. She also considers the transgenders who beg at the traffic signal as mean and have no respect. She has accepted her role of dancer as a blessing given by God and as history has taught her. We find a tradition in

Hijra community too. They call the old Hijras as Masi. There are stories of Sunayana who is addressed as Hijri among Hijras. She is a girl who was being found by Dimple to whom someone has thrown in the garbage. There comes the story of Sherpa who has to enter in the community of Hijras due to poverty. He is a trained dancer but could not find any respect and job therefore he has to enter in to the world he starts earning his livelihood by dancing in the group of Hijras. His needs induce him change his gender performativity. Though he is a male yet he has to divert his gender role in social structure.

“On hearing about hunger his stomach started clapping. He started thinking that in this big city he is the only one who cared him. So what if he is a hijra, he will at least give food! Maybe he arranges some job for me. The thought came to his mind that the real hijras are those who did not respect my art and left me to starve. God has only made Hijras.”

(25, Saurabh)

The story of Sherpa takes a touching turn when he starts living in hijras group and a girl in the group falls in love with him. He was completely unaware of the terrible result which was being unfolded before him when Dimple comes to know. She could not tolerate this progress of love as Manju gets pregnant. Dimple gets Sherpa's penis cut and gets Manju's child aborted to shatter their world of love. The criminalization of their role has been depicted brilliantly by Saurabh. It is not so that she does this disgusting deed because all hijras are like that, probably insecurity for his entire community enforces him to do this. The simple theory of Newton's 'action and reaction' can be best applicable here in this context as society has discriminated them so as they are reluctant to accept society mainstream as well. The table is turned now. They don't know the better way to react in the context in which they are embroiled. Society has marginalized them here, in their domain they have marginalized the society as well. It is hard for them to manage impression management. In Goff's way hijras become the spectator.

The tradition and rituals which hijras have in their community are not hidden to anyone. It is as obvious as the sunlight. In the novel Saint Aashamai is a hijra and she is against the fact that for our benefit we should never play with nature. No one should be forcibly made or converted in to hijra. All the hermaphrodite communities in various parts of India follow her orders.

Another story tells the history of Nikita and Anandi aunty whose daughter was born as hermaphrodite. Anandi aunty was reluctant to give her to hijra community but when she could not find an honourable place for her in society and when she fails to give her education she had to handover her daughter to Neelum. This is nothing but a pathetic tale where society does not accept a person as a human being but his or her sex decides one's place in society if it is a male or female they are allowed to be in society or else they have to be on the margin only. They are not only discriminated as unwanted but abused as well where they are doomed to face embarrassment. There is no better way than to live their life but to entertain the rest and be unwanted. Indeed, they have their prerequisite role performance which is assigned to them and there is no world beyond them. Hijras identity is a social construct and there is no lacuna which is allowed to be filled. Their identity is controlled by bio politics which is governed by the machinery of power politics, undoubtedly.

The depiction of hijra's life and living take a moving turn when it is projected under the shadow of globalization. When the time of recession comes and there is increasing demand of transgenders by the customer instead of female prostitutes. Hijras in India have to sell their bodies to earn their bread and butter. There is excruciating depiction of such kind of groups of hijras who have to come to certain area to get their so-called customer to get consumed. No matter how intellectual they are or what skills they have or what human attributes they have. Instead of finding commonalities in them our society judge and decide their roles after finding only one difference and that too is very private! We can study and

understand this difference in Derridean 'difference' way and with Foucauldian genealogy approach to fill the textual lacunas.

Further, one more issue comes alive as something urgent to be discussed in relation with transgender, is scandalization and criminalization of their gender role and gender performance. Our society takes it for granted and it comes very easily to throw an identity of a culprit and a group which is the first suspect in any scandal found in society. They are frequently, named as people who steals children and who are violent enough to be involved in any kind of brutal activity. Our first gaze goes at them if something wrong happens in our society. They are not only socially marginalized but they are on the margins, psychologically and culturally as well. Their life is already disturbed with something puzzled and ambiguous; on top of that people keep on imposing their judgmental and biased identities on them that eventually, takes the form of trauma. They do not find any other option but to live their lives in darkness and confusion. A question can be asked what they want from society and the answer is as simple as sun-set and sun-rise that they merely want acceptance. Acceptance of what they are and how they are. They want a gender sensitivity towards them.

Pradeep Saurabh, in his novel *Tesari Tali* very interestingly, has depicted power politics. He does not only portray the power politics of society where two sexes male and female with their gender role of man and woman become biologically powerful and dominate the intersex people. But he has given vent to power politics within the hijra community too, where one hijra tries to control the hijra community and tries to rule them. The subject of domination is nothing but gender and its ambiguity. If a person with a male appearance is wearing saree or any other woman's attire that person becomes a handy victim in the hands of society. There is no matter of racism, casteism or culture but they are suppressed by power politics of society which subjugates their identity, creates their identities and allots their gender role as well.

There is mechanism of social control where power politics play a dirty role to dominate others and violate one's personality to the degree of shattering it completely.

When Anandi aunty gives birth to a child whose sex is hermaphrodite, they all start whispering how she can raise an incomplete child. The sex is not recognized as third gender or intersex but 'incomplete'. The child was given the name of a girl Nikita. Anandi aunty tries her best to give education to her child but due to unclear gender she could not succeed. She was compelled by society's norms to send that child to a hijra community. Neelum, a leader in Hijra community adopts her and there is a festive atmosphere on the arrival of Nikita in the Hijra group. But Nikita could not bear this pain and bereavement and commits suicide. The psychological journey of a hermaphrodite is always different from that of perfectly normal male and female child. It takes long for a transgender to realize the fact related to the sex. It takes long for one to make oneself understand and announce to oneself that he is a hijra. Their psychological journey is all the more painful and traumatic.

Pradeep Saurabh does not forget to point his finger at transvestitism in some regional part of India. Transvestitism is a tendency found in a male person to dress up like a female. He talks about the imposed transvestitism by powerful people of society on forcing some people to be like 'a launda'. In the north-east part of India there is a peculiar kind of custom to keep 'a launda' who is basically a male but he has to wear and act like a female. This fashion has been depicted as hobby of powerful people. They have been given wealth, money and position in society as well. They are considered as a symbol of social status and even the 'launds' have a dignified status in comparison to hijras. They are supposed to be the private property of their patron or better to say their owner. They are symbolically called 'Hathi' and to keep a hathi in society was not considered a child's task.

Tesari Tali raises the voice of gay people also. In a gay people's case, they don't find romantic connection with their opposite sex but rather finds satisfaction emotionally,

romantically and sexually as well in their same sex. This is usually known as gender dysphoria when a person feels ‘wrong sex’ in his or her body. Tension upsurges on psychological level and he has to subdue his will as society does not grant permission and considers this kind of behavior as ‘unnatural sex’ and moreover they are considered as bestial and often they are labelled as people suffering from paedophilia, means sexually frustrated people. They are easily considered as someone who has sex hunger and is involved in promiscuity. There is story of Suvimal Bhai and Anil who are gay and love to be in company of each other. For worldly world Suvimal Bhai has to marry a girl but he hates female. He cannot be sexually involved with her. One day she discovers the truth behind his continuous reluctance towards her. He tries to convince her. Suvimal Bhai is inclined towards Anil and he is happy with him sexually and romantically as well. There is discussion on Act 377 of Indian Constitution that considers homosexuality a crime. The struggle to eliminate the act has been depicted here.

“For a man to become a woman and remain a woman seems to be a disaster in many texts. In the Bhagavata Purana, Narada tells King Pracinabarhis a cautionary tale – that of Puranjana, whose excessive love for women led to his rebirth as a woman. The moral of this story, according to Narada, is: ‘Renounce the householder’s stage of life [lit. women’s house] with its talk about extremely lustful and lascivious gatherings’ (IV. 29.55). However, a new pattern emerges in the later Puranas, influenced by ascendant Vaishnava devotion, wherein men aspire to become women (as opposed to this happening to them involuntarily). This pattern becomes dominant in the medieval period, when erotic love displaces friendship as 019 The Criterion: An International Journal in English Vol. 9, Issue-II, April 2018 ISSN: 0976-8165 www.the-criterion.com the main form of devotion, and men wish to be reborn as women and to live as women, in relation to God.” (Vanita & Kidwai 22)

After the narration of several stories related to transgenders and homosexual people, Pradeep Saurabh comes to offer a proposal. He is not a writer who only wants to point his finger at issues pertaining to third gender but rather he wishes to fill the vacuum and wishes to make his readers sensitive towards the sexual urge of a human being. Through the story of Vineet who is born in Gautam Sahib's family as an intersexual child and he tries to keep him hidden somewhere in his house, even Gautam Sahib has to send the child to a Hijra community. Vineet becomes Vineeta but Gautam Sahib gave him skilled based education. Education plays an important part to change his life drastically. Education helps him to earn his livelihood in a more dignified way and helps him to uplift his status in the society as well. He emerges as a winner and creates his own brave world.

“Sexual orientation is an essential attribute to privacy.” (Benjamin Kentish) Further, the judgement stated: “Discrimination against an individual on the basis of sexual orientation is deeply offensive to the dignity and self-worth of the individual. Equality demands that the sexual orientation of each individual in society must be protected on an even platform.” (Benjamin Kentish)

We are living in a world where one should be given a choice to identify his or her gender and act accordingly. There is a warm talk about gender fluidity where gender is a matter of choice and not a factor determined by sex. Gender fluidity can also be understood as gender free or genderless and gender neutral feeling. One concern comes here that gender fluidity may be just a phase in one's life and not a thing for forever. The matter of gender fluidity is a conflict between nature and nurture. It is painful for a person from LGBTQ to recognize one's gender and accept it, the psychological tension increases as they have to tell the truth to their parents or in some cases parents have to accept the truth after the discovery of gender and finally it is a tremendous task to announce to the world their identified identity,

and the task becomes a traumatic experience when they have to tell to the conservative and conventional society. It is traumatic psychological journey.

To sum up the arguments related to the issues and concerns of third gender we can say that identity of a person should be given as a choice and not as social construct, the role of society should be to build one's confidence and not to subdue one's voice and throw one on the margin. Instead of generating a lot confusion in third gender we must give them acceptance not as something social stigma but something liberated who should not be left on the margin to waste their mental energy to prove their identity but who could contribute with their potentialities to serve humanity. Above all they are human beings and no one should have rights to deprive them of their human rights. There have more commonalities than differences in them. There may be conflict between appearance and behaviour, there may be unending discussion between nature and nurture but there must be a consensus that nothing is prohibited and everything is permissible when we talk about humane and humanity. Permission should be granted to come to the centre and prohibitions must be revoked. This is what The Supreme Court of India grants with the verdict of NALSA judgment in 2014 and now the perfectly normal acceptance should be given from the core of heart of the people. They should not be left with their pre-defined gender identity on the traffic signals. Society must open its arms.

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